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THREE DELEGATES, SENATOR ALIGN, SEEKING VICTORY

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BODY:

Four years ago, political upheaval was the name of the game in Northeast Baltimore's District 43.

Then, freshly realigned district boundaries forced seasoned state politicians to defend themselves against a double-barreled threat -- challenging newcomers and a powerful peer pushed from a redrawn district into theirs.

Two of the three incumbent delegates lost their seats in the fray.

Now, Sen. Joan Carter Conway, who has represented the area in the General Assembly for nearly 10 years, is running again, allied with the Democratic delegates who won the last election.

In the Sept. 12 primary, the four are hoping to shut down competition coming from individuals in their party -- including a former delegate ousted during the last election.

"I think the district has been solidified [since redistricting]," Conway said. "I think everybody's going to be fine."

In addition to name recognition they honed during many years in public office and numerous red-letter endorsements, Conway and her team -- Dels. Curtis S. Anderson, Ann Marie Doory and Maggie L. McIntosh -- have also raised a formidable amount of money.

In the last reporting period, Conway had nearly \$100,000 on hand. Her sole opponent, Dave Vane, a 30-year-old part-time park ranger from Lauraville, had \$652 in the bank.

The incumbents also have power in the General Assembly. Among the four, they hold key committee positions -- spots that give them the ability to influence legislation and infuse the city's perspective into the debate.

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"We're in leadership," said Conway, vice chairwoman of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. "If you make a change, you really don't have as much influence and clout" in Annapolis."

Despite these inherent advantages, the incumbents appear to be working the district with the intensity of candidates on much shakier ground.

"We've gone door-to-door seven days a week. Not five. Not three. Seven," McIntosh says, adding that her opponents are "not working nearly as hard. They're just not."

In 2002, the predominantly black district, which spans such neighborhoods as Homeland, Guilford, Waverly, Ednor Gardens and Hillen, surprised political observers by spurning two African-American incumbent delegates to elect Doory and McIntosh, both white women.

Michael V. Dobson, one of those who lost his seat, filed at the last minute this year in an attempt to win it back. Although in the last reporting cycle he had not raised a cent, he insists his candidacy is serious.

The 56-year-old semiretired insurance adjuster says he finds the city's representation in Annapolis to be lackluster -- at best. His campaign motto fits this theme: He's coming back for good reason.

"This city delegation has been a failure in the last four years," Dobson says bluntly. He points to electricity deregulation and inadequate school funding as two "flagrant" examples.

"Something as complicated as the deregulation of energy in the state of Maryland was not even dealt with until the last half of the session," he says. "That's like if in World War II, we tried to invent the bomb in the last six weeks of the war."

Mary Washington, who is also running for a House of Delegates seat, says she also has not found the district's delegation inspiring.

"People want not just an adequate representative, but an assertive and proactive representative," the 43-year-old management consultant says.

Dobson and Washington won the endorsement of Baltimore's influential Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, which also endorsed McIntosh and Conway.

The incumbents expect that if any issue comes back to haunt them at the polls, it could be fallout from the electric rates crisis, which dominated the debate in Annapolis early this year and again at a special summer session.

Challengers such as Dobson have made a point of calling out how the incumbents voted on electricity deregulation. Though Conway voted against it, McIntosh and Doory approved the 1999 legislation.

"I don't know if one vote can kill ya," Doory says. "I did the best I could."

Mike Miller is also seeking a delegate seat in the Democratic primary. He did not respond to phone messages.

Facing the winners of the district's competitive Democratic primary races will be a handful of Republican and Green Party candidates.

The Green Party's Maria Allwine is seeking the Senate seat. And in the delegate's field, Republican Armand F. Girard has filed as well as Green Party hopefuls Brandy Baker, David G.S. Greene and Richard J. Ochs.

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO(S) / MAP(S)

1. Senator Conway has represented the district for nearly 10 years. 2. District 43
2. sun news graphic

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